Research Paper

Inclusive Practices For Socially Disabled

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A B S T R A C T

Inclusive design is "a process that results in inclusive products or environments which can be used by everyone regardless of age, gender, or disability" (Centre for Education in the Built Environment, 2003). The concept of inclusive design has been evolving. In much of the literature it also addresses race, socioeconomic status, education, culture, and language. Inclusive design is an approach to designing products that address the needs of as much of the audience as possible. Other terms that are used in a context similar to inclusive design are 'design for all', designing for diversity, and 'respect for people' (Centre for Education in the Built Environment, 2003).

Importance of Inclusive Design

All education is grounded in a social framework, based on certain assumptions. When certain educational decisions are made, the door is closed to other options. As content is selected, other content is excluded; instructional designers and educators are constantly making decisions about what will be learned and how, methods of learner assessment, and many other factors that affect the learning environment. Currently, many educational decisions reflect the dominant culture perspective. The curriculum and teaching.

Learner Characteristics and Inclusivity

Gender As instructional design is a human activity performed by people who are gendered, and hold certain social values, the education they design is not a value-free, scientific fact, but a human construct. Some gender issues may be fairly obvious, such as the use of exclusionary language (I just loved the quote from Cunningham (1986), who is advocating for a constructivist and semiotic approach to educational research: "There are no good guys and bad guys, only guys".) (In Hlynka, 1991). Other issues, such as differences in learning styles, are harder to recognize. Designers must actively examine their gender assumptions so they can create instruction that is more gender-inclusive.

Gender bias in language usage involves more than exclusionary terms. Certain types of jargon and cliches are favored more by males than females. The sports metaphors and violent terms that are so pervasive in our culture speak more to males than to females (Powell, 1997). The ways in which men and women tend to discuss their ideas can differ, too. Men tend to 'state the facts'. Women tend to look for an interconnectedness of ideas, which can be perceived as weak by men (Campbell, 1999).

Culture

Culture is not the same as ethnicity, which implies a person's historical heritage determined by birth, such as Belgian, Japanese, or Italian (Powell, 1997). A person can have a certain ethnic background that he or she does not identify with culturally: social practices, not biology, are the basis for culture. For example, while my father looks like a visible minority to many people, culturally he is Polish. He identifies with Polish culture, and spoke Polish as his first language.

Cultural factors and the learning environment.

* How does the classroom and instructor reflect cultural assumptions? As a beginning teacher, I realized how arbitrary and culturally bound it is to put students in rows of desks and assume they will learn best this way.

* What are the learners' views of time: It can be puzzling for teachers with a Western notion of time, that is, valuing punctuality, to encounter students who do not like to be slaves to the clock.

Socioeconomic Status

Students from a lower socioeconomic status may be alienated from the instruction in many different ways. The classroom environment and practices, things under the teacher's control, may be based on values that learners do not share. Learners may not relate to the curriculum. The activities and examples that the teacher chooses may not relate to the life experiences of students from a lower socioeconomic status.

Inclusive Practices in Education: Principles and Guidelines

Principle One: Equitable Use

The principle of equitable use states that the design is useful to people with diverse abilities. Instructional designers can strive for this through strategies such as avoiding segregating or stigmatizing learners, and making the design appealing to all learners (Connell et. al., 1997).

Principle Two: Flexibility in Use

The design can accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities by providing a choice in methods of use, facilitating the user's accuracy and precision, and allowing the learner flexibility in pacing (Connell et. al., 1997).

Principle Three: Simple and Intuitive Use

This principle states that the design is easy to understand, regardless of the learner's experience, knowledge, or language skills. Guidelines to help achieve this include eliminating unnecessary complexity, being consistent, accommodating a wide range of literacy skills, arranging information according to importance, and providing effective feedback (Connell et. al., 1997).

Principle Four: Perceptible Information

The fourth principle states that the design communicates information effectively. Instructional designers and other educators can aim for this goal through strategies such as multimodal presentation of information, and ensuring compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations (Connell et. al., 1997).

Principle Five: Tolerance for Error

The fifth principle states that hazards can be minimized through making the most used elements most accessible and providing fail-safe features (Connell et. al., 1997).

Conclusion

Instructional design is a human activity; the education is affected by the social and cultural influence of those people who are involved in the design process. It is not possible to create instruction that is completely inclusive. But instructional designers can play an important role in ensuring that instruction reflects more than the dominant culture perspective. Through learner analysis and an examination of the learning environment, they can take a critical look at who the instruction serves, and who is excluded.

R E F E R E N C E

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